

CHAPTER XI

MACAULAY'S ERRORS

THE complaint has often been made that in his History Macaulay displays strong prejudices. Certainly he was himself a man of firm convictions and he had a robust faith in their correctness. He naturally took a partisan attitude and scorned neutrality. He was not troubled by intellectual doubts and was frequently unfair to those who were. He was liable to judge men and events once for all and to label them good or bad without much discrimination. His sympathies, though warm, were rather limited, and he could rarely appreciate the good points in anyone or anything unpleasing to him personally. As Leslie Stephen said, * his likes and dislikes indicate a certain rigidity and narrowness of nature/ ¹ Consequently, though he sometimes stated both sides of a question fairly, his own preference is evident. He hardly ever adopted a strictly objective attitude, but at least he is generally consistent in his bias.

Some of Macaulay's prejudices were inherited and others may have been derived from his early environment or reading, but a main source was unquestionably his political career. As a Whig he had taken a leading part in the bitterest political struggle of the nineteenth century, that over the first Reform Bill, and the passions aroused by that struggle remained strong enough to

cloud his view of
the past. In a speech made at the
Edinburgh election in

¹ Hours in a Library (1892), ii. 347.